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UNCLAS COLOMBO 001323

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [OIIP](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: "Mystery American" attends Sri Lankan
intelligence meetings, II

Ref: Colombo 01273

1. As reported in reftel, from 7/14 through 7/22 Sri Lankan newspapers had a field day reporting that an AmCit -- a "mysterious American" -- had participated in meetings of the GSL's intelligence community. Several dailies carried straightforward coverage of the allegation. Others treated the story as a "cohabitation" saga, further evidence of the ongoing spat between President Kumaratunga and the UNP government. Still others characterized the American's alleged presence as an anti-LTTE plot.

2. The story has garnered additional attention since 7/22. On 7/23, under the headline "Bug Them: U.S. Spy Advisor," the independent English DAILY MIRROR (7/23) reported in the style of the NATIONAL ENQUIRER that "powerful sections in the Government have requested security services to tap telephones of a few senior government ministers and MPs in view of the unstable political situation prevailing in the country.... It is learnt that telephones of certain ministers are being tapped and a weekly report is to be submitted which in turn is to be handed over to [the] American advisor...."

3. The saga received a different spin on 7/29 when the ISLAND (independent English daily) editorialized under the headline "Gung-ho and the National Security Council." The ISLAND's positions: one, "we do not know whether involvement of foreigners could worsen or improve the past and present performances of the [National Security] Council. But the NSCs of the past have failed to rise up to the challenges and brought disaster to this country;" two, although it is feared that foreign presence will lead to leaks, "this fear is unfounded because in our open mouthed society ... secrets of the nation ... are leaked out ... by officials in the council itself!"

4. Excerpts:

The fact that in about 25 years a rag-tag band of youth has been able to resist the three professional armed services and the police and build themselves up to a conventional army while establishing a financial establishment stretching from Europe to the Far East, including an international shipping line speaks volumes of the failure of our military, defence and diplomatic establishments of which the NSC is a key component.

Internationally, it is apparent that either we did not have a regular intelligence service, which was of absolute necessity with the terrorist net spreading globally for the past two decades or those whom we deployed for intelligence were of no use. Nor have we been able to liaise effectively with intelligence services of foreign nations which were much better informed about the international terrorist activities of the LTTE....

The fear of having foreigners in sittings of the National Security Council is that confidential information being leaked out. This fear is unfounded because in our open mouthed society where the secrets of the nation discussed in the National Security Council

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are leaked out to the national press, quite obviously by officials in the council itself!

Officials who want to smear their predecessors or successors find it quite convenient to leak information to damn their arch foes irrespective of the damage it would do to the country. Arms merchants could provide detailed reports of discussions of the NSC.

We do not know whether involvement of foreigners could worsen or improve the past and present performances of the council. But the NSCs of the past have failed to rise up to the challenges and brought disaster to this country.

All the gung-ho about foreigners being involved in intelligence matters can be appreciated but the native sons have failed miserably so far. The NSC has to be reconstituted and new defence and intelligence strategies thought of. By whom is the question.

5. End excerpts.

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